



Obstruction Island Lights, Aids to Navigation

By: Edrie and Terri Vinson

The northeast point on Obstruction Island got its first light on January 10, 1893, according to Captain J.A. Hatfield, the Seattle signal officer for the 13th District of the Lighthouse Establishment. Just who the first light keeper was is lost to us, but in early 1906, we know that it was Charles Williams. The following year Charles moved to Hood's Canal, and rented his house to Louis Archambault, who also would be looking after the lights. In April of 1910 the San Juan Islander reported that J.B. Weldy and family of Dophin Bay would occupy Obstruction Island and tend the lights. Then on November 24, 1911, the same newspaper reported that C.S. Willis of Olga had been appointed Keeper of the Obstruction Island light at Peavine and Obstruction passes. The appointment was made upon the recommendation of Robert Moran, owner of Obstruction Island.

Cecil Swainson Willis (1873-1927) was born in England, and came to Washington Territory about 1886 with his parents and siblings. He married Emma Louise Culver, and together they raised two sons and two daughters. His youngest daughter, Jane (Barfoot-Hodde) wrote that two lights were required, one as stated above, and a second red light on the west point. Her father rowed a boat to the Island once a week to fill the kerosene lanterns and clean the globes. In bad weather Willis kept a boat on the western side of the point where he lived, and walked or rode horse back to it, rather than trying to round the point in a storm. Sometimes he would go early, if he thought a storm was coming, because the passage could be very dangerous in rough weather.

In 1913 The Lighthouse Establishment built a supply shed on the Willis property. It adhered to strict proportions according to the design, and was tall enough to hold the oars

for the boat. In it was kept the many 5 gallon cans of kerosene, extra globes and wicks, and cloths for cleaning them. This supply shed was serviced by the Heather twice a year, and was a treat, according to Jane. "The tender would stop a long way out from shore; the water was too deep to anchor. A small boat was lowered over the side with, as I recall, eleven neatly uniformed sailors who rowed in perfect unison while the coxswain stood in the stern at the tiller. As the boat neared the beach, all the oars were raised vertical in unison, then lowered into the boat; quite a show for country kids." Sons Culver and John took over operation of the lights after their father died in a logging accident in 1927.



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